



THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

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JOSHUA LEDERBERG

PRESIDENT

Dr. I. Levitz
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Dear Dr. Levitz:

Thank you very much for your paper "Children of Rabbis", which I read with great interest. Many of the anecdotes cited were quite familiar to me from my own experience, although I am sure that there is a large gap between the cohort of 1925 and the cohort of 1965. One thing not mentioned in your analysis is the self-confidence of the rabbi himself with respect to his calling. As with every other profession, not everyone is and remains equally suited. But it must be very much more difficult to move from the clergy than it is from other professions.

A methodological comment: I am not clear what you are using for controls in a study which seeks to explore the influence of the father's profession on the reactions and outcomes of their children. There are stresses and difficulties in all kinds of families and it is not easy for me to tell whether they are more frequent or qualitatively different among rabbis' children than others. Some of the anecdotes may reflect a certain amount of scapegoating" but the visibility of the father as rabbi is itself a distinctive feature.

Your remark on the top of page 17 about children of rabbis being attracted to a "secular clergy" is particularly resonant with my own experience, as you might have judged from the autobiographical sketch that I sent you. I am very grateful indeed for the tradition that my father passed on to me; but as time goes on I am even more cognizant of his own singular ability to accommodate his upbringing and reactions to my own reconstruction of the same themes. Were he more overbearing or had I been less self-confident, the outcome might have been more problematical.

See Tradition 23:76-87 1988

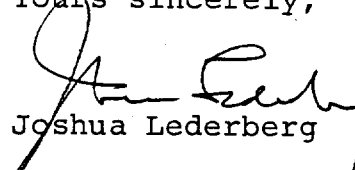
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I do have to reflect that I have met hardly any other scientists (although of course many of them are Jewish) who came from a similar rabbinical background. One outstanding exception is Mordecai Gabriel who has been Professor of Zoology, and is just retiring as Provost, at Brooklyn College. In fact I knew him and his family as a child.

I would be fascinated to learn of your continued studies in this field. Judging from your bibliography it is an area not much worked on. But I do think you will have some challenges in developing a robust methodology and analysis.

Yours sincerely,


Joshua Lederberg